

UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

Fort Hamilton, New York 11252

THE JUNIOR AT WORSHIP

by

James H. Taylor

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INTRODUCTION

"Let the children come unto me" are words spoken by Jesus to his disciples when they were attempting to keep some children away from Jesus. A few years ago this story began to have new meaning for me as several Sunday School programs were promoted with a great deal of success. The Sunday School children were encouraged to increase their religious experience by becoming a part of the worshiping congregation. There was always a problem in handling these children in a formal worship setting when many of them came to the services without adults to supervise them. My problem was how to conduct a worship service that would be meaningful for these children without hindering the worship of the adults in the same congregation.

This paper began as a study of the various worship methods as used and understood by others that might help me solve this problem. Upon doing some research reading it was discovered that possibly the methods were not the most important aspect and maybe not even an answer to the above problem. Very early in the preliminary readings it was discovered that a deep understanding of worship for Juniors was needed. This study has taken this paper beyond the realm of just methods to the why, the what and the who of Junior worship. Methods and their advantages and disadvantages have remained a part of the study but do not have the importance that was originally placed upon them. The following

statement influenced this idea that the method is not the most important thing:

Sometimes it is easy to forget that children cannot be made to worship. They cannot even be given an experience of worship. All that can be done is to provide the atmosphere, the opportunity, and the means through which they may worship if they have a desire to do so.¹

The impact of this statement immediately changed the course of this research paper. It has become an attempt to better understand what Junior worship is, in the terms and language of the Junior, to learn what types of opportunity will best fit the needs of the Junior child, and discover ways to increase the desire of the children to want to worship.

¹Grace W. McGavran, Learning How Children Worship (St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1964), p. 25.

I. WORSHIP AND THE JUNIOR

What is worship? "It is difficult if not impossible to formulate a single statement that embraces the total meaning of worship."² With this statement in mind this paper will present ideas that seem to reflect some generally accepted concepts concerning worship and the Junior.

Worship is an act of reverence toward God for what He is and thankfulness to Him for what He has done. Further, "worship expresses his esteem for the powers which he conceives to have control over his destiny, and seeks relationship with them or control over them."³ The child may not be aware of what is actually happening here, but most authors agree that this is a part of the process of worship.

As a child is led in worship it must be realized that vital worship involves the whole being in adoration and praise of God. To get this total involvement from a Junior is a difficult task. This difficulty is because worship "comes from experience, not from learning facts about worship or defining it,"⁴ and most Juniors do not have the necessary experience to know how to involve his total being. My previous concept of the child in

²Paul H. Vieth, Worship in Christian Education (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1965), p. 22.

³Ibid., p. 23.

⁴Florence B. Lee, Worshiping God at Church (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1958), p. 25.

worship was a young person in attendance at worship services in order to be educated in the ways and means of worship so that when he became an adult he would be able to step in and perform the worship act. Lee's idea above has destroyed this concept. One must recognize the potential for worship experience in these yet young children of God. They are not present just for educating but they have come also to worship on an equal basis with every other member of the congregation. Their experience is their worship just as it is so with the adult. It may not be as refined and elegant as the adult's, but it is still worship. So, we have a responsibility to provide them with every possible experience.

According to a survey taken among the chaplains at the United States Army Chaplain School, there are several methods of providing worship experiences for Juniors.⁵ Three of these methods are discussed here along with some of the advantages and disadvantages of each. They are presented to assist us in evaluating our methods of meeting our responsibility to provide a meaningful worship experience for the Junior.

Separate Worship Service for Juniors

Description

A complete separate worship service for Juniors was the method of providing a worship experience for Juniors used by most of the chaplains responding to the survey. In this type of

⁵United States Army Chaplain School, Fort Hamilton, New York, surveys completed by members of the student body, April 1973.

worship activity the Juniors would have a separate place for worship from that of the regular congregation and often times the Juniors themselves had the responsibility for the conduct of the service in whole or in part.

Advantages

1. Worship service can be planned to meet the educational and emotional level of the children involved.
2. Length of the service can be adjusted to the interest and attention span of the children.
3. Adults are afforded the opportunity to worship free of interference from Junior members.
4. The service can be used as an educational tool to develop the child's knowledge of worship.
5. Children can have a wide and varied opportunity to lead in worship.
6. Atmosphere may encourage more of a response from the children to the worship activities.

Disadvantages

1. Separates the Juniors from the total congregation.
2. Management and conducting the service may be a problem:
 - a. Insufficient trained personnel to handle the planning and conduct of the service.
 - b. Providing a separate worship area.
 - c. Supervision of children going to the service, and prior to and after it is completed since parents are not available to assist.

3. Adult leaders may have to miss the congregational worship service.

4. Does not provide for a family worship experience.

Use of A Children's Sermon

Description

Most of the surveyed chaplains also indicated they often used a children's sermon in the regular worship service as a method of providing a worship experience for children. Most of them further indicated they would have the children depart for other activities following the children's sermon.

Advantages

1. Children made to feel important because something of the worship service has been planned especially for them.
2. Children maintain some contact with the congregation.
3. The children's sermon can be planned to meet the educational and emotional level of the children involved.
4. Family can worship as a unit at least for a portion of the worship period.

Disadvantages

1. It is difficult to program continuously.
2. Management and conducting the service may be a problem area as indicated in the disadvantages listed under the separate worship service above.
3. Adult leaders may have to miss the congregational worship service.

4. Continuity of adult worship experience may be hindered because of break in the service to dismiss the children and/or to present the children's sermon.

5. Children may feel like they are being treated as not worthy to worship completely.

6. The first part of the regular worship may become incidental to the adults as they wait for children to leave.

Juniors to Participate in Regular Worship Service

Description

Children would worship as any other member of the congregation. Some chaplains indicated they provided leadership opportunities for the children from time to time in the regular service.

Advantages

1. Family can worship as a unit.
2. Children may feel they are a part of the total congregation.
3. Children may feel especially important if given leadership positions.

Disadvantages

1. Length of service may cause restlessness among the children and cause distractions for other worshipers.
2. Children may not be able to understand the service because of his educational and emotional development.

II. WHY JUNIORS WORSHIP

The reasons for Junior worship is another aspect that is important to understand. It will be impossible to lead Juniors to a worship experience if we have no concept of why they should worship. Normally, we conceive of them worshipping just because everybody else is doing it and it is expected of them. That is not so in today's society. Juniors will have to have some idea of why they should worship and it is a responsibility of church leaders and parents to help Juniors understand why.

Why Juniors should worship is no different than why adults should worship. However, this study helped to exemplify these reasons and they are well worth noting at this time for future reference and remembrance.

We worship because there is something within our being that says we must. As one author states it:

We cannot do otherwise. We eat because we cannot live without food. We communicate with others because we cannot exist as persons apart from human relationships. We worship because our very existence demands that we give our devotion to Something outside ourselves; our religious nature demands that we find meaning for our existence in a Supreme Being.⁶

This compelling nature is in the Junior, maybe more so than in the adult, as he is entering the phase of his life when he is asking questions about who he is and what he is. This inner compulsion causes him to seek some answers to questions about the presence

⁶Vieth, Worship in Christian Education, p. 26.

and concept of God in this world. He may not be aware of what he is doing, but even in his small way of expressing awe at the wonders of the universe is in itself an expression of worship toward the One who has created it all. He is often times more aware of these wonders than is the adult. The adult so often becomes so involved in his own small world that he fails to see the glory of the Supreme One in life around him, even though he may attend worship services on a very regular basis.

Lee has a very complete list of what worship does for us and it may be helpful to consider when one is dealing with the Junior worshiper. He says that worship helps the Junior:

1. To know more about God.
2. To feel secure and depend on God.
3. To know that God is good and expects the worshiper's best.
4. To know better what will please God and to have strength to do it.
5. To be stronger to do the right when he is tempted to steal, cheat, or lie.
6. To let God know how he feels about Him.
7. To feel joyous and good inside.
8. To know what God would have him do to help other people.
9. To know what he can do to make the world a better place.⁷

If one could accomplish all of this in a single worship setting a miracle would be performed. However, this should all

⁷Lee, Worshiping God at Church, p. 31.

be the aim of every worship service for the Junior congregation,
as well as services for the adult.

III. HOW TO HELP A CHILD WANT TO WORSHIP

In an earlier quote from McGavran (above, p. 2) it was noted that we could not make a child worship. Some may wonder then why this section is included in this paper. We may not be able to make a child worship, but there are many experiences in his life that we may build upon to create a desire in him to want to worship.

A child at the age of the Junior will be in a stage of growth that will be taking him from his family more and more each day. He may feel in need of love because of this slow separation. This need for love may bring him into a fellowship, such as the church or church school, that will enable him to experience the love of a group to replace what he may be losing from the family. This group can help him with many of his personal problems and give him security in the absence of the family group.⁸ We may be able to assist the child in realizing his need for worship within this religious group.

The child's awareness of the world around him may also bring him to a desire to worship. For centuries mankind has turned to God for his answers to many of the questions about life, man, the world, religion, and life after death. This search for the meaning of all of life and his own place in this life and

⁸Iris V. Cully, Children in the Church (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 44, 56-57.

world has been a factor in many young lives turning to God in worship. An awareness of this search by the leaders of worship may well help them assist a young boy or girl in reaching some of the fullest heights of worship that can be experienced.⁹

A child's awareness of wrongdoing may also be a factor in directing his thoughts to a Supreme Being.¹⁰ As he becomes aware of his need for repentance, forgiveness and restoration, the church has an opportunity and a responsibility to meet these needs and direct the child to a worshiping experience that will meet his need.

"Worshiping adults help children to want to worship and become able to do so."¹¹ The church is people and they have a wonderful opportunity to help create a desire within the child to want to worship. As McGavran goes on to say:

It depends largely on the adult whether or not such a vivid sense of communion with God is felt that the children themselves feel his presence and enter into the joy of real prayer. A worshiping adult conveys the reality of worship as no mere instruction about worship or mere 'leading in worship' can do.¹²

The following list of what Junior worship must be can be of assistance to the adult as he plays his part in leading Juniors to a wholesome knowledge of God and an accute awareness of His presence that He may be worshiped by the Junior:

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 57-58.

¹¹McGavran, Learning How Children Worship, p. 27.

¹²Ibid., p. 28.

1. It must be purposeful.
2. It must be consistent.
3. It must be oriented.
4. It must be interesting.
5. Its materials must be familiar.
6. It must allow Juniors to participate in worship leadership.
7. It needs to be flexible to a certain extent.
8. It should be rich.¹³

Goldman would add another item to this list. He says that Junior "worship...should deal with real life experiences so that worship can be experienced as relevant to life."¹⁴

Being aware of the reasons why a child would come to worship and understanding the needs of that child as he comes will be a big beginning in a successful program for Junior worshipers.

¹³Ibid., pp. 123-128.

¹⁴Ronald Goldman, Readiness for Religion (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), p. 158.

IV. CONCLUSION

New methods of conducting effective Junior worship were not discovered as a part of this paper. However, new insights into the Junior's religious needs and his place in the worship of the total congregation can be a beginning for me for new experiments with the old methods and encouragement for a search for innovative adaptations of these old methods so that children in my worship services can be brought into an enriching and spiritual worship experience with our Lord Jesus Christ.

James H. Taylor
JAMES H. TAYLOR
Chaplain (CPT), USA
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